

Good afternoon ladies and gentleman. My name is Katie Watterson. I am the mother of three children, a sociologist by training and the owner of Apple Blossom Montessori, a preschool in Missoula. I own the preschool that Zane had to be completely immunized before attending.

This situation made me distinctly aware that I needed to make a very difficult decision. I had to decide whether I was going to protect people's right to choose whether or not to immunize their children because of their personal, philosophical or religious beliefs, or whether I was going to maintain accessibility to my school to lower income families. Let me explain my situation further: As the owner of a preschool I cannot accept children who have not been immunized if I hold a daycare license. Conversely, if I refuse a daycare license in order to accept those children whose parents have religious objections to immunizing, I cannot accept any state or federal grant, but more importantly I cannot accept children whose child care costs are subsidized by the state.

My personal story complicates my decision even further. Ten years ago when I wanted to pursue my own education I was a single mother and I did not have the money to send my children to a quality childcare facility so I needed the states assistance. Luckily assistance was available to me and I was able to go to school, graduate with high honors and I have integrated into the community as a contributing member. I no longer need any kind of assistance but it was vitally important that I got it when I was a student. Therefore, how can I turn away a family that is trying to better their situation by working or through education?

On the other hand, I as a parent, decided, after my own child had an adverse reaction to an immunization that I was not comfortable immunizing my children as scheduled by the state. I made this based on my own beliefs. So how can I ask parents who want their children to attend my school to do something that I was not comfortable doing?

As a sociologist, I am keenly aware of social justice and the law as it is right now promotes injustice with either decision I could make. I either have to turn away families either based on their religious belief, or I have to turn away families based on their income.

To make the decision to allow families who have made the very personal choice to immunize or not, I would be in violation of the law. The law, as it is right now, in essence, is forcing me to discriminate against people by not allowing me to remain licensed if I enroll children those family.

I want my school to be assessable to people, regardless of income, and regardless if religious belief. I implore you to consider the inherent injustice in the way that the law is now arranged. Today, you get to make the decision to allow for individual religious freedom and end institutionalized discrimination.